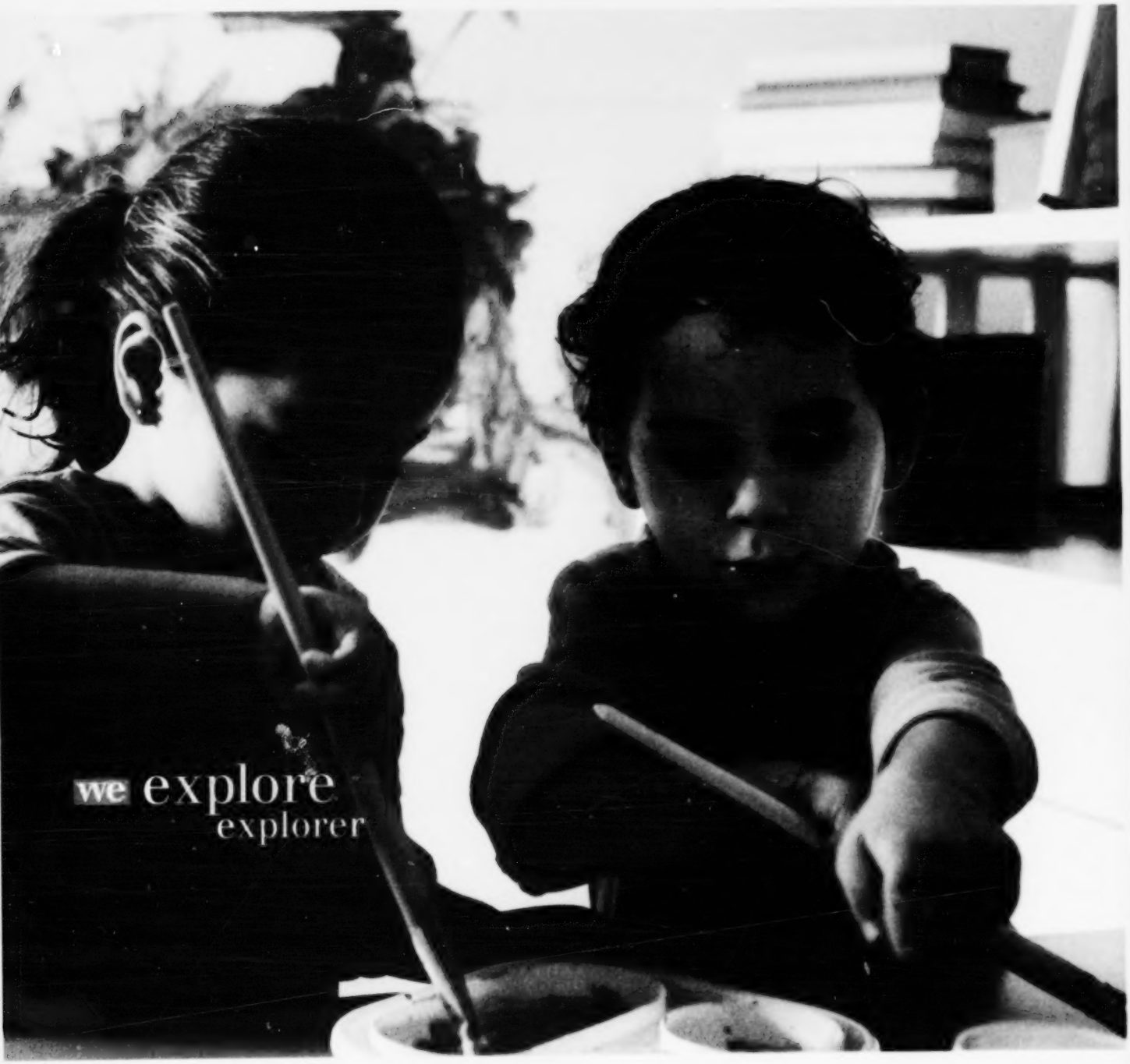
2010 | 2011

French Immersion Kindergarten

Curriculum Handbook for Parents



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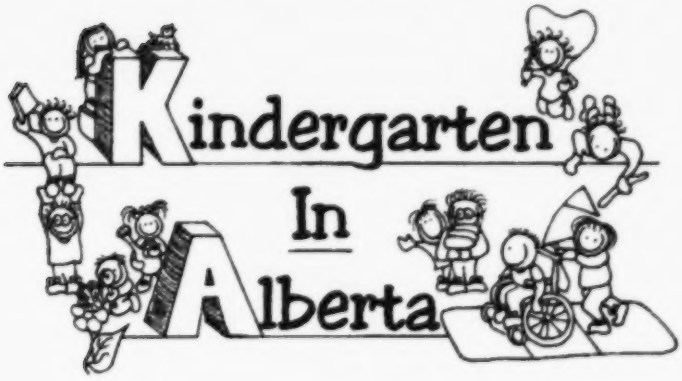

A Handbook For Parents

2010 – 2011

Alberta Education

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Message from the
Minister of Education

As we look forward with excitement to the possibilities and opportunities of another school year, it is important to take some time to review what our students will be learning, and to make sure that all of us are prepared to ensure every child can find their passion and fulfill their potential.

Through our community engagement initiatives, such as *Inspiring Education* and *Speak Out*, I have spoken with thousands of Albertans in our communities about education, its role in our lives and what we want it to do for children and youth, now and in the future.

It's quite clear that Albertans value their education system and understand that it is the foundation for the future economic prosperity of our province. However, we must continue to build on our tradition of excellence. To do that, we need a new approach to education. We need transformative change.

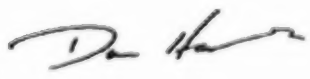
Just as you are looking at what your child will be learning over the next year, we are examining how we teach our children and what they will learn. Now, more than ever, we are able to take a big-picture, long-term view of what education needs to be. We are looking at how we can improve learning outcomes rather than simply using the same curricula in a different way. We are transforming our education system to embrace optimism, passion, talent, curiosity, creativity and intelligence.

Parents play an integral role as agents of change in their children's education by providing them with the encouragement and support they need to succeed academically. It is clear that students benefit when parents are actively engaged in their children's learning because together, both have a solid understanding of the tasks, challenges and rewards offered through our programs of study.

I hope you will also look at the many other learning opportunities that are available for your child outside of their schooling. Libraries, community and recreation centres, service organizations and mentors all enrich young peoples' learning and build on the lessons they learn at school.

This curriculum overview is a valuable resource that will answer many questions you may have about what your child is learning. I also hope this publication will create an opportunity for open dialogue between you, your child and his or her teacher regarding curriculum outcomes and expectations.

I encourage you to take the time to read through this resource. I wish you and your child every success this school year.



Dave Hancock, Q.C.
Minister, Alberta Education

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Welcome to French immersion kindergarten in Alberta

1. What is kindergarten in Alberta?

A rite of passage

Entering kindergarten is an exciting time for every child. Moving from the home environment to the school environment is a rite of passage. For the child entering French immersion kindergarten, this not only also marks the start of school but also the beginning of learning in French. Both parents and teachers want this transition to be as smooth as possible. A child who feels safe and accepted is much more likely to take on new experiences.

An important program of Early Childhood Services

The terms Kindergarten and Early Childhood Services are often used interchangeably. However, "Kindergarten" refers specifically to the education program for children in the year prior to Grade 1. "Early Childhood Services" refers to the broad coordinated system of local and provincial programs that meet the developmental and special education needs of young children and their families. The kindergarten program is an important part of early childhood services.

Kindergarten: a program of choice for parents of children under six years of age

In Alberta, parents decide if their child will participate in kindergarten or other programs provided for children who are under 6 years of age, as of September 1. Most children enter the kindergarten program one year before entry into Grade 1. The local school board sets the policies for age of entry into Grade 1. Children with special education needs may be enrolled in an early childhood services (ECS) program from two-and-a-half years old.

Early childhood: an important time in a child's development

In Alberta, the kindergarten program is based on the following beliefs relating to young children, their learning, and their home and community environments.

- Children develop through similar stages, but at individual rates. The kindergarten program provides learning experiences that meet individual and group needs, interests and developmental levels. Your local school board will provide you with information as to the additional supports available to children with special education needs and their families.
- Young children are naturally curious and eager to learn. They benefit from developing positive relationships with others, including children of their own age. The kindergarten program provides opportunities for children to learn about their environment through organized activities, purposeful play and cooperation with others.

- Parents are their children's first and most important teachers and play a central role in the lives of their children. The Kindergarten program supports and respects the dignity and worth of the family and encourages parents to participate in their children's education.

- The kindergarten program plays a role in the coordination of community services for young children and their families. Kindergarten programs are operated either by a school board, in a similar way to programs for Grade 1 to Grade 12, or by an ECS private operator. A private operator is a nonprofit society with an elected board of parents and community members. Children enter kindergarten in a variety of settings in Alberta, including schools, community facilities and daycare centres. Some kindergarten classes are totally separate from other classes, others are part of an elementary school, kindergarten to Grade 6, and a few are members of a whole school community from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

2. What is French immersion?

The long-term goals of the French immersion program are:

1. *full mastery of the English language*
2. *functional fluency in French*
3. *understanding and appreciation of the French culture*

In Alberta, many parents have made the choice to give their child the opportunity to learn French by choosing a French immersion program. French immersion is a highly successful approach to second language learning — an effective way for students to become functionally fluent in French while achieving all of the objectives of the regular school program.

This program, designed for non-Francophone students, offers an effective way for students to become functionally fluent in French while achieving all of the learning outcomes of the regular programs of study.[1] Graduates from French immersion programs achieve a level of fluency in the target language that allows them to pursue their post-secondary studies in French or to accept employment in a workplace where French is the main language of communication.

There are many delivery models for French immersion in Alberta schools.

- Early immersion – students begin their immersion experience in Kindergarten and continue in the program to Grade 12.
- Late immersion – the entry point may vary but is typically Grade 7.

Parents are encouraged to contact their local school board for information about which schools in their area offer these programs.

[1] See Appendix 1 for a table illustrating the differences between the French immersion program and the Francophone program.

For more information about French immersion ...

Alberta Education's Yes, You Can Help! Information and Inspiration for French Immersion Parents available from the Learning Resources Centre at 780-427-2767. Dial 780-310-000 for a toll-free connection.

Canadian Parents for French (CPF), Alberta Branch: http://www.cpfalta.ab.ca

or the National website: http://www.cpf.ca

French immersion students are required to learn the same curriculum as students registered in the English program. The only difference is that they learn about math, health, science and social studies in French. In addition, they take French language arts.

Recent studies show that learning another language cannot only have a positive impact on your child's first language, it actually enhances learning in all areas. Current research has shown that exposure to a second language can:

- enhance the complexity of first-language syntax;
- enhance language use skills (narrative strategies, reading and writing literacy skills in the first language, vocabulary scores);
- enhance non-linguistic skills such as divergent thinking, metalinguistic skills, attitudes toward others and mathematics skills.

French immersion kindergarten is the first step in your child's journey in acquiring another language and gaining an appreciation of its culture while offering the possibility of a range of other cognitive, social, cultural and economical benefits.

3. What distinguishes the *French Immersion Kindergarten Program* from the regular kindergarten program?

Learning expectations of the "French Immersion Kindergarten Program" are essentially the same as those in the program offered to all other kindergarten children in Alberta.

Learning expectations of the *French Immersion Kindergarten Program* are essentially the same as in the program offered to all other kindergarten children in Alberta, and is centred on the whole child. It takes into account the child's particular needs and strengths, learning style and interests. The early French immersion program, also called total immersion, utilizes French as the language of instruction for the majority of class time (100% of class time in French is the goal). The French immersion approach is based on the premise young children learn a second language best when a "gentle approach" is used. They learn French in somewhat the same way they acquired their first language at home.

Young children learn a second language best through a "gentle approach".

The teacher welcomes the children into the program and progressively introduces them to the kindergarten environment and the French language. The children are given time to become acquainted with each other and with classroom activities and materials. Gradually, children gain a sense of belonging because they know the routines and school layout. Instructional strategies and materials support the acquisition of the French language by building on the language skills the children have already acquired in their first language. With encouragement and time, children show increasing confidence in using the words they learn in French to express themselves and their learning, just as they

learned to speak their first language through repetition, imitation and trial and error, moving from uttering single words to saying simple sentences.

The *French Immersion Kindergarten Program* exposes the child to rich and varied language activities to promote the acquisition of French in meaningful ways. The child learns to think in French over time by building two distinctive labels for one concept. All this helps the child to develop the fundamentals of language that are the building blocks for listening, reading, speaking and writing in French.

4. What can we expect to see in our child's first year in French immersion?

Each child follows their unique path and will learn in their own particular way.

You may worry about your child feeling insecure or frustrated in a total immersion setting; however, what research tells us is reassuring. In *So You Want Your Child to Learn French*, Weber and Tardif report: "During the first days of school, we carefully observed both the regular and immersion students with some of parents' most often voiced concerns in mind. However, contrary to our expectations, the second-language element did not really seem to be a major source of frustration or difficulty for the children. The video recordings and interview clearly show that the children were able to construct much meaning from the immersion situation even at the beginning of the year ... Many of the children, for example, offered the following explanations of how they came to understand the teacher's French: 'I just listen very hard and my brain figures it out'; 'I think of a word in English it sounds like'; 'I ask the teacher'."(pp. 55-60)

The French immersion kindergarten program provides learning experiences that meet the developmental needs of all children. Children move through similar stages, but with their own pattern and at their own rate of development and learning. When children enter the Kindergarten program, there may be as much as a year's difference in age between the oldest and the youngest—one-fifth of their lifetime! Taking this into account, Alberta Education's guide to French immersion parents, *Yes, You Can Help! – A Guide for French Immersion Parents* states, "As a general rule of thumb, children who participate in an immersion kindergarten (half days) will have gradually switched from English sentences with French words and phrases thrown in to French interspersed with some English by Christmas of Grade 1." (p. 29).

The *French Immersion Kindergarten Program* is based on the belief that all children can learn. It is important to remain positive and encouraging even though your child has not yet demonstrated any visible learning. Some children wait to speak until they feel confident in their ability to speak in French well. Each child

follows their unique path and will learn in their own particular way. The *French Immersion Kindergarten Program* respects these differences.

5. How can we prepare our child for French immersion?

The French immersion program is designed for non-French speaking children. These children and their parents are not expected to have any knowledge of French or any Francophone heritage.

Prepare your child for school just as you would if he were entering the English stream.

Alberta Education's publication, *Yes, You Can Help! – Information and Inspiration for French Immersion Parents*, states: "The best advice we can give when enrolling your child in an early French immersion program is to prepare him for school just as you would if he were entering the English stream, from ensuring that he can manage his own jacket and shoes to making him comfortable spending time away from you. Anything you can do to familiarize him with the school, the playground, the teacher (if possible during the spring), future classmates (if you don't know any of the other parents, you should meet them at the spring information / orientation meeting), the route to and from school, and the routine he'll follow in the fall will make the transition that much smoother. Most, if not all, of the children in his class will have no prior knowledge of French, so don't feel it's necessary to put him in a French pre-school or daycare. On the other hand, it's a good idea to expose him to a little French beforehand so that he can enjoy some familiarity with the sound of the language: a French cartoon on the TV, a segment of Sesame Street, a bit of French music on a children's tape or compact disc." (p. 50)

What are young children like?

Young children are developing socially, physically, intellectually, creatively and emotionally. All these areas are related to each other and dependent on one another. Early childhood is a time of rapid intellectual growth and development. The development of the intellect is influenced by social, physical, creative and emotional growth. The learning of French in kindergarten is facilitated not only because of the receptiveness of the child's brain at this stage but also by the holistic approach of the kindergarten program.

The *French Immersion Kindergarten Program* provides learning experiences that meet the developmental needs of all children. The following descriptions of developmental characteristics are typical of most, but not all, children in kindergarten.

1. Social Development

Kindergarten children are becoming more socially oriented and are making friends with children of their own age, although these friendships may change frequently. They are learning to share, cooperate and play in groups. They are increasing their awareness of a variety of social behaviours and situations, such as being friends, taking turns, being fair and having conflicts. Adults, especially family, are still very important; their support and approval help children adjust to unfamiliar situations.

2. Physical Development

Kindergarten children are moving into a time of slower growth after the rapid growth of the early years. They have better control of their large muscles than of their small muscles, and continue to develop abilities, such as running, hopping, climbing, balancing and jumping. They may have some difficulty with small materials, such as writing tools, scissors and shoelaces. They are increasing their ability to control and coordinate movements, such as throwing, kicking and catching a ball. They are learning to use all of their senses, but their vision and hearing are not yet fully developed.

Children of this age are full of energy. They tire easily, but recover quickly. Sitting still for long periods of time is difficult, so they need a balance of active and quiet times.

3. Intellectual Development

Kindergarten children are gaining knowledge of objects, relationships and events in their immediate experience by doing, observing, imitating and exploring. They are developing fundamental thinking skills related to their direct experiences, but their reasoning, memory and problem-solving skills are still limited. They are beginning to plan and think ahead, but often think and act in the here-and-now. They still view things mainly from their own perspective, but are becoming more able to understand the views of others. They are developing the ability to pay attention for longer periods of time, and their memory is increasing.

Young children's hearing and speaking vocabularies increase rapidly, and they love to talk. They develop their ability to stay on topic, take turns and tell stories. They ask many questions about the world around them. They experiment with the sounds of language and begin to express their ideas in pictures and writing. They develop a "sense of story" through listening, reading and viewing.

4. Creative Development

Kindergarten children want to express their personal ideas and feelings, and they need people to listen and respond to them. They explore, experiment and create, using a variety of materials. Their work becomes more detailed, and they talk about what they have created. They often take part – spontaneously and imaginatively – in music, dancing and movement. In dramatic play, young children experiment with different roles and discover new solutions to problems. The process of creating is often more important to them than the end product.

5. Emotional Development

Emotional development includes experiencing and expressing feelings, and developing independence, decision-making skills and initiative.

Kindergarten children display their emotions easily, intensely and visibly. They are developing the ability to understand and differentiate between their own emotions and those of others. They are learning socially appropriate ways to express their emotions. They want to do things themselves to demonstrate their growing confidence and independence. They are ready to take on more responsibilities and are developing a sense of self – a feeling of being different from others. They may also express fears and show anxiety when separated from familiar people, places and things.

How do children learn in French immersion kindergarten?

Purposeful play is an important way children learn.

Young children see the world differently than older students and adults, and they learn best through direct, sensory experience. They need to manipulate, explore and experiment with real objects. They learn by doing, moving and talking. Educators and psychologists refer to play as the serious work of childhood. Children at play are highly motivated and capable of intense concentration.

In the French immersion kindergarten classroom, as in a regular kindergarten program, children are busy playing and learning together in varied activity centres. Learning centres give children the opportunity to explore and discover, and take responsibility for selecting and completing a variety of activities. Some learning centres may be available all year. Others are introduced for special projects, interests or at seasonal times. Workspaces, activities and materials are organized in response to the children's diverse

needs, interests and activities, while taking into account the expectations of the kindergarten program.

The learning environment is organized to actively engage the child in learning and using the French language.

On closer observation, one can see how children integrate the French language in regular activities. Children interact with each other while exploring ideas and the world around them, and as they do so, they imitate the songs and expressions they learned in French and begin to use French words for objects and actions in their play. As children play, they are clarifying information, integrating experiences from previous experiences, and exploring and experimenting with their environment. In the French immersion classroom, children also clarify their understanding of the French language, integrate new words, and explore and experiment with the language through their play.

Through play, children learn to deal with their feelings, interact with others and resolve conflicts. These moments provide opportunities for a broad and rich development of French language. Through play, children also develop their imagination, creativity and ability to solve problems and the French immersion classroom offers ample opportunity to support language development in these areas. For example, walls covered with French print materials, shelves displaying assorted French-language books, audio and visual materials, and a variety of language activities supported by visuals and mime encourage children in their active learning of the language and the mastering of skills.

What do children learn in French immersion kindergarten?

Learning in kindergarten is integrated and holistic.

The *French Immersion Kindergarten Program* outlines expectations in eight learning areas. These experiences are equivalent to those found in the regular kindergarten program:

- French Language Arts (Early Literacy)
- Social Studies (Citizenship and Identity)
- Physical Education
- Health and Life Skills
- Environment and Community Awareness
- Creative Expression
- Mathematics (Early Numeracy)
- Early Learning Skills

Learning in kindergarten is integrated and holistic. The expectations, which are clearly defined in the *French Immersion*

Kindergarten Program, include a list of general and specific outcomes. Children's personal learning rhythms, growth and specific needs are always considered in the planning of the learning environment.

The eight learning areas describe what young children need to learn to prepare for entry into Grade 1 and to provide a foundation for later success. Most importantly, they address the social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional dimensions of each child.

The following is a summary of the general expectations for these eight learning areas.

French Language Arts (Early Literacy)

In the daily routines and experiences of the French immersion kindergarten, each child will gradually build on his comprehension of French oral communication as they participate in shared reading and listening experiences through the use of picture books, fairy tales, rhymes, stories, photographs, illustrations and videos.

Listening skills are emphasized throughout all activities in order to stimulate language acquisition. As your child progresses, and his knowledge of French expands, he will be introduced to more vocabulary and language structures. This is done while talking about everyday events and the world he lives in.

The rhythm and melody of French songs make language acquisition a pleasure. Through games and play situations, your child will be invited to imitate and repeat words and sentences. He will begin to integrate new vocabulary in his everyday communication. Mimes and gestures, voice pitch, context and illustrations will all contribute greatly to your child's language acquisition. Eventually, your child will be able to initiate a conversation in French.

Many types of books, stories, poems, recordings and videos will be used to develop language prediction skills, to encourage your child to ask questions, make comments and express their feelings and experiences. Your child will also express his ideas, experiences and his imaginary world through the use of pictures, letters or words. He will learn to use illustrations to give him information about the books he is reading.[1] He will start to understand that letters and words have a specific meaning. He will begin to recognize, copy and write familiar words and letters in French, thereby reinforcing and building on language skills already developed. Furthermore, studies have shown that his language skills in both languages are reinforced as he is exposed to a language rich environment outside of school.

[1] Reading: A child begins the process of becoming a reader as he turns the pages of a book and follows the words with a finger as he is being read to or as he examines the illustrationsof the book.

Social Studies (Citizenship and Identity)

Each child brings his own perspective, culture and experiences to the kindergarten classroom. Social Studies focuses on the development of a strong sense of identity, self-esteem and belonging. These provide the foundations for your child to become an active and responsible citizen. Your child begins to develop his sense of identity and citizenship through active inquiry into his social, physical, cultural and linguistic environments.

In kindergarten, your child will explore who he is in relation to others in his world. He will be given opportunities to become aware of who he is as a unique individual and to express himself by sharing his personal stories. Your child will discover how he is connected to other people and to his communities and will be encouraged to express interest, sensitivity and responsibility in his interactions with others.

Physical Education

Physical activity is vital to all aspects of normal growth and development. Early childhood is the time to begin the development of healthy lifestyles. In kindergarten, your child will acquire skills through a variety of developmentally appropriate movement activities, whether it be through dance, games, gymnastic activities, individual activities and activities held in alternate environments such as aquatic or outdoor pursuits. Through these activities, your child will be encouraged to interact positively with others and will learn the elements of cooperation, respectful communication, fair play, leadership and teamwork. In French immersion, the Physical Education program offers another rich opportunity for your child to actively develop a wide range of vocabulary and to encourage your child to spontaneously express himself in French.

Health and Life Skills

In kindergarten, your child is encouraged to enhance attitudes and behaviours that reflect healthy choices and reduce the potential for harm. Your child is offered opportunities to continue developing personal responsibility for health and demonstrating caring for others. As Health and Life Skills touch on lifelong skills for the child, developing the vocabulary and sentence structures in French to enable him to exercise healthy choices is a critical part of this program of studies. Your child is given many opportunities in French immersion kindergarten to allow him to further develop spontaneous and accurate expression in French.

Environment and Community Awareness

Your child will be encouraged to continue using his five senses to explore, investigate and describe their environment and community. He will be invited to recognize similarities and

differences in living things, objects and materials. He will become increasingly aware of the relationship between cause and effect and encouraged to generate ideas to make personal sense of the environment.

Your child will explore the design, function and properties of a variety of natural and manufactured materials. Using simple tools in a safe and appropriate manner, he will select and work with a variety of materials to build structures. He will explore scientific and aesthetic concepts, using sand, water, blocks, clay and other materials, and begin to use some technology appropriately.

Your child will be invited to explore familiar places and things in the environment and community. He will role-play familiar home and community situations and activities, identify familiar shapes, symbols and sounds and recognize seasonal changes in his environment and community as well as familiar animals in his surroundings.

Creative Expression

Your child will be invited to explore and express his thoughts and feelings through visual arts, music, drama and movement. He will become aware of his own imagination and creativity and that of others as he interacts with a variety of materials and responds to various forms of expression. He will begin to develop an appreciation of the fine arts, as he becomes aware of why and how ideas and feelings are communicated in many ways.

By viewing and responding to natural forms, everyday objects and artworks, your child begins to learn about how we see and interpret visual images. Your child will be invited to express himself through movement and individual and group musical activities, songs and games. He will listen to and begin to appreciate a variety of musical instruments and different kinds of music. Through dramatic play and movement, your child will grow in self-awareness and self-confidence and develop his imaginative and creative thought.

Your child will be encouraged to use past experiences to develop new ideas. He will experiment with using familiar materials in new ways and choose media, tools and materials to represent his ideas and experiences. He will begin to connect his own experiences with forms of artistic expression in the world around him.

Mathematics (Early Numeracy)

Young children are naturally curious and develop a variety of mathematical ideas before they enter kindergarten. They make sense of their environment through observations and interactions at home, in daycares, in preschools and in the community.

Mathematics learning is embedded in everyday activities, such as playing, reading, beading, baking, storytelling and helping around the home.

In kindergarten, your child will engage in activities that contribute to the development of number and spatial sense. He will learn about numbers, patterns and relations by sorting, matching and counting familiar materials, and by putting them in order in authentic and meaningful ways. In daily activities, he will learn to compare objects according to length, capacity and weight and develop awareness of temperature, time, shape and space.

Your child's curiosity about mathematics will be fostered as he engages in and talks about his creations and discoveries and he will begin to develop his abilities to reason, visualize and problem solve, abilities he will continue to expand and refine throughout his schooling.

Early Learning Skills

This learning area focuses on building positive attitudes so that your child will see himself as a competent and capable learner, making him more willing to try new things and take risks. Your child will be encouraged to become more independent and learn to take responsibility for selecting and completing learning activities. He will understand the rules and routines of his learning environment and accept them as ways that help people work and play together.

Your child will also take part in developmentally appropriate activities that specifically support the development of his gross and fine motor skills, essential building blocks for developing the coordination and control needed in a range of activities from writing, drawing and building to pursuing active pursuits.

Our Child's Personal Needs and Progress

1. How and why is children's learning assessed in kindergarten?

Assessment is a natural, ongoing and important part of daily learning.

Assessment is an integral part of learning. By questioning and talking to your child, listening to the language he uses and observing his behaviour, adults gain information about a child's levels of skill and understanding. Throughout the kindergarten year, the teacher will observe and record your child's learning and progress in relation to the expectations for the eight learning areas included in the *French Immersion Kindergarten Program*.

The teacher keeps notes and uses checklists to record observations. The teacher looks not only at your child's work but also at the skills and strategies he uses. By observing your child many times in different situations, the teacher is better able to build a more complete assessment of his learning. Portfolios of work selected by your child and the teacher may be compiled over the year. A portfolio, containing items such as artwork, journals, samples of work, tape recordings or photographs, provides a meaningful picture of your child's progress throughout the year.

Your child demonstrates his learning in appropriate and practical ways in an encouraging and supportive environment. He shows his disposition to learn through his curiosity and persistence in learning activities, his ability to adapt to new situations, and his contribution to group activities.

Information that the teacher gathers about each child is used in several ways. This information helps the teacher plan the learning environment and match learning activities to learning needs. The teacher is able to provide ongoing feedback to your child to help him recognize what he knows and is able to do, and to focus his efforts on more challenging activities.

Through oral or written reports, parent evenings, classroom visits and conferences, teachers and parents can exchange ideas and information, and you can learn more about your child's progress and achievements. In some kindergarten programs, your child will be invited to participate in conferences with you and his teacher. This experience allows your child to reflect on and celebrate his learning and set future goals.

2. If my child has special needs, how will the *French Immersion Kindergarten Program* meet these needs?

Early Childhood Services (ECS) is based on the belief that all children can learn.

Early Childhood Services (ECS) is based on the belief that all children can learn. School boards and private operators are responsible for meeting the special education needs of ECS children. In ECS programs, including the *French Immersion Kindergarten Program*, children with a variety of needs and skill levels work and learn together. The teacher ensures that all children are included in activities that help them build on their own level of learning.

Some young children may have special intellectual, emotional, sensory, physical or communication needs that affect their learning. Others experience situations that can also influence their learning, such as frequent changes of residence or significant changes in the home environment.

In Alberta, over 90% of students with special needs are placed in regular classrooms. Successful placement depends on factors such

as teacher training, learning resources as well as guidance and support from administrators. A French immersion student with special needs can be accommodated in a regular French immersion class if these same factors are present. Research and experience demonstrate that very few students cannot benefit from learning in a French immersion program. (Edwards, 1989; Keep, 1989; Wiss 1989; Ali Khan, 1993; Rousseau, 1998)

For more information on special needs ...

Visit:
http://education.alberta.ca/francais/admin/speced/parents/immersion.aspx

The Standards for the Provision of Early Childhood Special Education provides information on the requirements for school boards and ECS private operators.

The Learning Team: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs provides a general overview of how parents can become involved in the education of their children.

The Journey: A Handbook for Parents of Children Who Are Gifted and Talented provides information and strategies for nurturing your child's learning and emotional well-being at home, in school, and in the community.

The above documents are available on the Alberta Education Website, or for purchase from the Learning Resources Centre:
http://www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca/pro/default.html

Alberta Education's guide for French immersion parents (*Yes, You Can Help!*) notes that "immersion students with a variety of difficulties – from learning disabilities to low intelligence to behavioural problems – will do as well academically as they could be expected to do in an English program, provided they receive the same assistance as they would if enrolled in the English stream. Studies also indicate that immersion is not likely to be the cause of learning difficulties; the same problems would arise in any educational setting. Any student who can learn to communicate in his first language can acquire a second language through the immersion process" (p.36).

Children with special education needs are identified so that they and their families may receive appropriate services and support. For example, children identified as having mild, moderate or severe special education needs may enter an ECS program at a younger age to access early education services. Some children will need special supports or adaptations, such as personal help or large print books. These approaches allow children to increase their potential for learning and to make the most of learning opportunities.

Schools may provide information to parents about available community services to assist them in meeting the needs of their children. Community services may include health, social and family support agencies; recreational and cultural associations; and a wide variety of other groups that work with children in the community. Coordination of services supports the integrated learning needs of children.

There is a wide range in children's abilities and development throughout the ECS years. Parents who are concerned about their child's learning needs should contact the teacher.

3. How will the *French Immersion Kindergarten Program* prepare my child for Grade 1?

The French immersion kindergarten experience will enhance your child's personal development and will give him a growing sense of responsibility. The program teaches them how to try new things with confidence, creativity and a "can do" attitude. Your child's endurance and stamina will build gradually over the year.

Parents across Alberta have noticed how kindergarten gives their children a strong disposition for learning in a school environment. Children become familiar with the expectations of teachers and are motivated and focused to take on new challenges. Most children leave the kindergarten program after one year, ready to move on to Grade 1. In some cases though, a child needs more time before going on to the Grade 1 class. This is a decision that parents and teachers make together.

Parents and teachers working together will help to ensure a successful educational experience for children.

4. How can parents be involved?

As a parent, your role in your child's life is central. You are responsible for meeting your child's physical, social and emotional needs. You are the child's first teacher, and family influences are lifelong.

When children begin French immersion kindergarten, parents and teachers enter into a partnership to support children's learning. For the well-being of their children, parents are encouraged to become involved in the French immersion kindergarten experience, to the degree that both teacher and parent feel is appropriate. Parents can share expertise and skills with the class, help organize activities or school/family functions, assist on field trips, prepare materials at home, and give ideas or input to the program.

At school

Each teacher invites parents to get involved in various ways. Even if you don't speak or understand French, your presence is very precious to your child and to the teacher. You can participate in classroom or outside activities. Some French immersion kindergarten teachers have scheduled helper days, while others encourage more informal, drop-in visits.

Here are some typical tasks carried out by parents in the French immersion kindergarten classroom:

- assisting at a learning centre
- helping with snacks
- listening, with the children, to the reading of a book
- learning new French vocabulary with the children
- supervising simple games
- obtaining, preparing or cleaning materials
- sharing personal expertise with the children
- organizing and supervising the classroom library
- listening as children read or share a nursery rhyme
- preparing materials for art activities
- helping children with their clothing
- assisting with field trips or special activities

- providing clerical assistance (typing, filing, sorting or photocopying for the teacher)
- preparing bulletin board displays
- preparing charts, posters and booklets.

For more information on the role of school councils visit:

http://education.alberta.caparents/role/schoolcouncils.aspx

The *Alberta School Council Resource Manual* can be consulted on Alberta Education's Website or purchased through the LRC: http://www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca pro/default.html

As well, most kindergarten programs have a parent committee called a Local Advisory Committee (LAC), and privately operated kindergartens maintain a governing board. Parents may wish to serve in a formal position or in a supporting role. All public, separate and charter schools now have a school council, and the LAC, or governing board of a private operator, may be directly involved in this council.

It is often a good idea for parents to get to know each other and build a social network. Children of a French immersion kindergarten class may continue to go to school together. Parents who meet in the kindergarten room could end up sitting together at the Grade 12 graduation banquet table!

A list of typical questions many parents have for the school are included in Appendix 2.

Communication between the school and the families in this first year is very important to the children and their parents. It is common practice for kindergarten teachers to use newsletters, notes and telephone calls to share information with parents. In turn, you are encouraged to become involved and communicate with your child's teacher and school with any concerns.

Below are but a few suggestions on how you can continue to support your child's French immersion kindergarten experience through at-home activities.

At home

Things you can do to help develop your child's first language and culture:

- read stories aloud at bedtime
- tell your own stories and share your childhood experiences with your child
- sing songs, nursery rhymes and poems with your child, putting the emphasis on similarities and differences in sounds
- help your child to print his or her name
- be a reader and a writer, in order to provide a role model for your child
- use good speech, as a model for your child's language skills
- celebrate and encourage your child's early attempts to communicate through writing and reading
- listen to your child and encourage him to talk about everyday activities
- expose your child to your own traditions, folklore and stories.

Things you can do at home to support your child's French language learning

- include some French in your everyday home life, for example, watching a French program on television, a video, attending a cultural event in French or listening to a CD of French songs. (You'll learn some French too, and the whole family will have fun!)
- review the French vocabulary of the week or month with your child
- listen to, repeat, recite, sing along with your child as he shares his latest French song, rhyme or story.

Things you can do at home to encourage your child to be more self-sufficient

- encourage your child to make decisions by offering him choices
- encourage your child to take responsibility for some tasks
- provide opportunities for your child to practise buttoning, doing zippers, drawing, cutting, blowing nose and tying shoelaces.

Things you can do at home to promote your child's good health to be more self-sufficient

- ensure plenty of rest, with early bedtimes
- ensure that your child eats a variety of nutritious foods from each food group
- encourage your child to walk, stretch, hop, jump, run, dance or skip, both indoors and outdoors.

Things you can do at home to nurture your child's artistic growth and creativity

- reserve an area in your home for drawing, painting, building or sculpture making. Basic materials such as coloured crayons, paper, accessories for role-playing and homemade musical instruments will be enough to trigger your child's creative mind
- encourage your child to solve everyday problems and find new solutions
- be positive and encouraging when your child is drawing, painting, dancing, playing music and role-playing. Ask questions about what he is doing and follow his lead when playing
- display your child's artwork at his eye level in a special place in your house; he will get the message that you value his work

- avoid giving your child models of objects and things to copy or imitate. Your child's creations are much more real and meaningful to him. Value the authenticity of his artwork.
- encourage your child to listen to a variety of music
- expose your child to the works of many artists: visit an art gallery, attend a music recital, dance performance or play
- invite your child to observe colours, shapes, textures, sounds and smells in his environment.

Include your child in everyday activities to practise new skills and explore new concepts

Young children need lots of practice and patient encouragement in their learning. Working together is just as important as completing the task.

- baking—have your child help to measure ingredients
- walking—encourage your child to observe his environment and to develop an active lifestyle
- shopping—point out the names of stores, gas stations, businesses, restaurants and schools; notice traffic signs
- gardening—give the child a small section to plant and care for
- writing—include a note from your child in letters to family; have the child write telephone messages and lists
- cleaning and tidying up—help the child sort toys into categories: cars, blocks, dishes, puzzles.

After the kindergarten day

Parents are in the best position to help children make connections between past experiences and current ones.

Each new experience adds to a child's knowledge, and when the child shares an experience with an adult, there is great potential for reinforcing the learning. Parents are in the best position to help children make connections between past experiences and current ones.

Still, talking with children about their experiences in French immersion kindergarten sounds easier than it is! The question, "What did you learn in school today?" often receives the response, "Nothing. All we did was play!"

These are some alternative questions that might help your child share more specific information with you:

- What new French word did you learn today?
- How did you make that?
- What are you learning about now?
- What learning centres did you go to today?
- What was in the sand table today?
- Can you tell me about the story you heard today?
- Where did you play today?
- Who did you play with today?

5. Where can I find more information?

A list of useful resources for parents is included in Appendix 3.

Many French immersion kindergarten programs have resources available for parents on a variety of topics, such as child development, discipline, parenting, health issues and community programs. Your French immersion kindergarten teacher and/or school principal may suggest other places to look for information, such as libraries, local agencies or government offices.

Be sure to visit the Alberta Education Website at http://education.alberta.ca

Two important sources of information are the Alberta Education Website and the non-profit organization Canadian Parents for French. Contact information can be found in Appendix 3.

Information Regarding the *Alberta Human Rights Act*

On September 1, 2010, section 11.1 of the *Alberta Human Rights Act* comes into force. This section requires boards (including charter schools) to provide parents with notice where "courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises ... include subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation." Where a parent makes a written request, teachers shall exempt the student, without academic penalty, from such instruction, course of study, educational program or use of instructional material. These requirements do not apply to incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes, human sexuality or sexual orientation. For more information, refer to the *Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12.*

Appendix 1

Differences between the French immersion program and the Francophone program

In both the French immersion and Francophone programs, French is the language of communication and learning. However, the two programs are quite different because they have different goals and serve different clienteles.

French Immersion Program	Francophone Program
Goals	***Goals***
• functional fluency in French	• mastery of French **as a first language**
• mastery of English	• mastery of English
• understanding and appreciation of the French culture	• cultural integration and the development of a strong identity and a sense of belonging to the Francophone community
• the development of a positive identity as a French language learner	• presence of French in all aspects of school as well as in community and home life
	• making the school an extension of the Francophone family and community in order to support children and their families in linguistic and cultural growth
Clientele	***Clientele***
• children whose mother tongue is not French, and whose parents have chosen to enroll them in French immersion in regions of Alberta where it is available	• children whose parents have the right to French first language education for their children according to section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*

Appendix 2

Questions parents may want to ask the teacher

The information about kindergarten programs provided to parents during registration will likely answer questions about hours of operation, school telephone numbers, vacation dates, emergency procedures, field trips and transportation, as well as explaining the French immersion kindergarten program and daily routines. Other questions parents may want to ask include:

- Does the program run for the full year?
- Will there be extra costs for special activities or field trips?
- How many children will be in the classroom?
- When can I stay in the classroom with my child?
- How can I help my child at home?
- Do the children go outside for recess?
- Are there different school entrances for different grade levels?
- Does the French immersion kindergarten class mix with children in other grades? Are those children also registered in the French immersion program?
- What are the rules for the classroom, school and playground?
- How do you handle discipline in the classroom and playground?
- How do you help resolve conflicts between children?
- How do the children solve problems?
- How do you help children solve problems?
- My child seems different from the others—shy, rambunctious, younger, older, sickly, allergic, asthmatic, doesn't talk much, talks all the time. How will he/she fit in?
- How can parents be involved? What is the role of the Kindergarten Advisory Committee or governing board?
- How many teachers are on supervision at one time?
- What are the times when teachers supervise?
- How many children attend the school? At what grade levels?
- What are the orientation and start-up procedures?
- What reporting method is used?
- When are report cards and conferences scheduled?
- How will my child's learning be assessed during the year?
- How is the snack/lunch program organized? My child has allergies to . . .
- Does my child need to bring any supplies for the year?
- Why do I need to sign a form to give permission to display my child's work outside the school or take photographs of him working at school?
- Will photos be taken during the year? Will I be able to get copies?
- Where is the outdoor play area?
- Do the children have regular access to a gymnasium and equipment?
- What services are available to the school; for example, health services, such as speech, dental, immunization; social and family support agencies; recreational and cultural associations?
- What is the difference between a Francophone, French immersion or French as a second language program? Which would be the most appropriate for my child?

Appendix 3
Parent resources

Suggested list of resources published by Alberta Education:

The following resources are usually available for review at your school. You can also purchase them from the Learning Resources Centre. Website addresses are provided for those resources available on the Alberta Education Website: http://education.alberta.ca

A Review of the Literature on Four Aspects of Second Language Learning (2004)
http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/resources/learnlang/educators/litreview.aspx

French Immersion Kindergarten: A Handbook for Parents (2008)
http://education.alberta.ca/media/445781/mat_eng.pdf

The Journey: A Handbook for Parents of Children Who Are Gifted and Talented (2008) *Alberta School Council Resource Manual.* http://education.alberta.ca/admin/special/resources/journey.aspx

The Learning Team: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs (2003)
http://education.alberta.ca/admin/special/resources/learningteam.aspx

Standards for the Provision of Early Childhood Special Education (2006)
http://education.alberta.ca/media/452316/ecs_specialedstds2006.pdf

Yes, You Can Help! Information and Inspiration for French Immersion Parents (2002)

For more information, contact:
Canadian Parents for French (CPF), Alberta Branch
Box 34090, RPO Kingsway,
Edmonton, Alberta T2H 2V8
Tel: 780-433-7311
1-899-433-6036
Fax: 780-433-7306
Email: info@cpfalta.ab.ca
Website: http://www.cpfalta.ab.ca
CPF's national Website: http://www.cpf.ca

Other interesting resources

University of Calgary's Teaching and Learning Centre with Alberta Education (2003). *Advantage for Life: Learning Another Language.* http://www.ucalgary.ca/lre/AdvantageForLife.htm

Archibald, John. *Boosting our children's potential with second language learning.*
http://www.ucalgary.ca/community/research/john_archibald

Weber, S. Tardif, C. (1990). The Young Child's View of Starting French Immersion, in *So You Want Your Child to Learn French!* Canadian Parents for French.

Feedback

Please help us to improve this document by taking a few minutes to answer these short questions.

Circle the phrase that best completes the sentence.

1. I found the information provided about the specific subject areas was (too specific / just right / too general).

2. I found the web links within the document were (useful / not required / problematic).

3. I found that the contact information provided was (useful / not necessary).

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

1. I believe that the information provided in this document will help me to discuss my child's education with teachers and school administration. (agree / disagree)

2. I was able to locate the information I needed easily. (agree / disagree)

3. This document helped me to locate other online documents and information. (agree / disagree)

Please tell us more . . .

I felt that there was enough information in this document about _____

but, I thought that there could have been more information in this document about _____

_____.

I felt that this document was missing information about _____.

Thank you for sharing.

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